Coaster Man

Before I died, rollercoaster’s were my passion. The other rides at amusement parks never turned me on with their constant circular pattern paths. Rollercoaster’s tracks travel through intricate twists and turns, up and down steep or short rolling hills, and swoop through small underground tunnels. The other rides just couldn’t compare with their…circular redundancy.

Throughout grade school I made it a point to ride as many rollercoaster’s as I possibly could. While my family cooked on the beach, I was on the boardwalk in my dock shoes patiently waiting in line for the next coaster ride. It became such an obsession of mine that my father made it a point to plan our vacation spots so as to always have an amusement park with a rollercoaster nearby.

After I graduated high school, I studied mechanical engineering at Drexel University. I even got my co-op helping a firm that designed rides for Six Flags. It was a dream come true. Perhaps because there weren’t many people who sought to design rollercoaster’s straight out of college, but I found myself working for Arrow Dynamics, an amusement park ride design company, a mere week after I graduated.

 I started off small, designing rollercoaster’s for children in kid’s section of amusement parks. I came up with creative names like “The Squirrel’s Nest” and “The Spinster” (That one was actually more of a joke aimed at the parents of the children.) The coasters I loved the most, as a child and as a young adult were the wooden ones. Something about their organicness captivated the twists and turns of my mind. Though I realized that their smoothness and speed could never compare to that of a metal coaster. Wood could just never handle the high speed, harsh angles and rapid twists that metal could. Also, from the day I knew that I wanted to design rollercoaster’s; I knew I wanted to change rollercoaster’s, not make variations on the same old same old. I wanted to make a rollercoaster the world had never ridden.

I worked on the plans for years. During this time I met a woman who worked at a park I was designing my first large rollercoaster for, and oh was she beautiful. 4,000 feet of track, two million dollars for construction, one loop de loop, one 500 foot underground tunnel, and a camera that took your picture as you raced down the 120 foot drop at 75 miles per hour. Everything you could ask for in a coaster and more.

But back to the woman I met. I met her while I was hanging around the exit of my first big rollercoaster, which by the way was named “The Grape Vine” after my favorite alcoholic beverage. I was haunting the exit because I wanted to hear the reactions of riders after just getting off the tracks. She was working at one of those gimmicky booths that you had to throw a ball at a cat that was perched on top of a brick wall to win a pitifully put together stuffed animal. She looked sad while I was riding high from all of the positive results I was hearing from “The Grape Vine” riders.

So I approached her and asked if she would like to grab a hot dog on her break, it would be on me. She looked at me weird, and then I realized the implications of the question. Me, a man in pressed pants, collared shirt and tie, approaching her, a young woman wearing khaki Capri’s and a park ordered shirt standing hopelessly behind a waist-high booth surrounded by stray stuffed cats, to grab a hotdog on her break. She later told me she thought I was some scumbag businessman looking to get off. If she only knew the satisfaction I was already getting off of hearing how great my ride was.

After a few years of courtship, she still had to attain her college degree and her college was far from my firm, which didn’t bother me, we got married. It was a nontraditional wedding, I didn’t trust priests and she was only raised on good morals, but it was a memorable one. The ring bearer was a small wooden rollercoaster, my first true love, which I designed. The ring was fastened safe in the front of the coaster that traveled around and loop de looped the outside pavilion in which our wedding took place. We served roast beast (an old joke from my uncle) and chicken francasie, Veronica’s favorite. Oh yes, Veronica was my lovely wife.

We had two children, Jeffery and Quincy. I loved them both but I guess, as it is with many a father, they wanted nothing to do with my passion. Jeffery was afraid of heights and Quincy, well Quincy just didn’t like going fast. Jeffery was about 14 and Quincy 12 when I died if I’m not mistaken. Both still had not overcome their fear of heights and speed respectively. I was always amazed at how understanding and forgiving a mother can be. I loved my children with all my twisty turnery heart but afraid of going fast? I spent many a night wondering how my little Quincy was going to go through life not going fast at some point. Imagine the agony of traveling on the highway during family vacations.

Over a 20-year span I completed the blueprint for my revolutionizing hybrid metal and wood rollercoaster. In all honesty, the parts that were wooden were just for show, they didn’t actually have any structural purpose other than aesthetics. One must understand that to revolutionize, some things must be left purely for show to attract the folks who prefer the old way of things.

“Odyssey” was what I decided to name it, and was it ever. Four 200 foot drops at 80 miles per hour, two massive loop de loops, 6 million dollars in construction, 7,000 feet of track, and a waterfall that drenches you halfway through but by the end, you are as dry as you were when you got on the ride, granted you weren’t already on the log flume. There were also many sections that resembled the back of a sea serpent. Those where the sections that, overhead, the wooden rafters gave a feeling of going through some kind of portal or tunnel. I wanted to make it so you didn’t realize you were surrounded with cold steel but rather, with warm organic wood.

After it was completed I *had* to be the first to ride it. I mean I had spent 20 years of my short time on Earth on the design and I was going to be damned if I wasn’t going to enjoy its virgin run with the ecstasy of a thousands wedding nights.

It started off just as I had wanted it to, with a burst of energy and speed. I made it through the two loop de loops and three of the four 200-foot drops at 80 mph and I was experiencing the most rewarding happening of my life. The wind blowing through my hair was sensational. The speed of the coaster filled every vein with adrenaline. I was reliving and riding the physical twists and turns of my life in the form of 6 million dollars of steel. Then I noticed the flaw. One of the wooden planks that lined the ceiling of the rolling hills was maybe a foot or so too low. I felt like the captain of the Titanic.

Thus the workers who were waiting my return at the coasters loading dock were greeted with a headless body. My head wasn’t too far away though, thank goodness. It landed five cars behind me and I had just the biggest smile on my face. It truly is a blessing to die happy.

After that minor change in wooden plank altitude, “Odyssey” instantly became the most successful rollercoaster in United States history. They don’t tell you this but they do have a special section in the afterlife for people who gain fame only after they die. So I spend my days chit chatting with Van Gogh and Kafka, about how blind people are to the art that surrounds them, and how none of us are ever going to make a penny off of our life’s works.

Kevin Rose (2012)